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ABSTRACT

Ways in which the field of applied linguistics is evolving in the changing global context are examined. After a brief review of the field's history in the late twentieth century, and of the development of a number of related professional organizations, the emergence of applied linguistics as an interdisciplinary endeavor is discussed. Major areas of current interest are also explored, including innovative language education and assessment, the crafting of sensible approaches to linguistic diversity, policy and planning in language-related contexts, and language issues in business and the workplace. A look at future directions in applied linguistics focuses on the changing demographic, economic, and technological conditions with implications for work within the field. Contains 14 references. (MSE)

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Applied Linguistics in 2000 and Beyond*

Donna Christian

Center for Applied Linguistics

*Remarks presented in a symposium on Linguistics 2K at the Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America in Los Angeles, January 1999.

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As we explore "Linguistics 2K," linguistics in the new millennium, I'd like consider how applied linguistics is evolving in the context of the changing world around us. As an interdisciplinary endeavor, applied linguistics depends on the contributions of linguists, and it is important that students of linguistics be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and *disposition* to work in applied areas — as a matter of employability and of professional responsibility.

Questions about preparing linguistics students to work on real world problems are by no means new. Roger Shuy, at the 1974 Georgetown University Roundtable on Languages and Linguistics, observed: "As a result of its isolative behavior, linguistics is now beginning to suffer from not having a natural apprenticeship domain, making it difficult for graduates to find work." (cited in Byrd, 1982:1) The Linguistic Society of America (LSA) in recent years has increased its efforts to link linguists with jobs outside of universities (supporting the establishment of the Linguistic Enterprises website, *http://web.gc.cuny.edu/dept/lingu*, for example), but preparing students for such jobs still receives relatively little attention.

Less has been said about professional responsibility, but recently that, too, has drawn some notice. In the anthropological fieldwork tradition, "giving back" to the community is an important concern, as it is in educational research where knowledge gained by studying schools, students, and educators is expected to benefit those subjects. A symposium on ethics at AAAL's 1993 annual meeting included such discussions (Connor-Linton & Adger, 1993), and other linguists have raised similar issues (Rickford, 1997; Labov, 1982).

Applying Linguistics and Applied Linguistics

Applied linguistics is fairly young. The field (as a labeled discipline) was christened in 1946 at the University of Michigan as a term for taking a "scientific" approach to language teaching. Over the years, the scope of the term gradually expanded—the first international

applied linguistics conference in 1964 invited papers in two strands: foreign language teaching and automatic translation (Tucker, 1996).

When the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) was founded in 1959, our first director, Charles Ferguson, described CAL's scope of work as "anything that had to do with solving practical language problems" (Ferguson, 1998). The initial mandate specifically named language education (to improve the teaching of English around the world and to encourage and improve the teaching and learning of the less commonly taught languages), but added more general goals (to address social and educational problems involving language issues through research and to serve as a clearinghouse of information and convener of diverse groups around language-related issues). The context then was post-Sputnik, and increased global awareness was accompanied by concerns in this country that our educational system was not producing the language competence or the math and science abilities that our nation needed in order to compete with the powers of the world.

As the field continued to develop in the 1970s, its inter-disciplinary roots became evident, as a group of professional organizations (including LSA, CAL, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA), Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)), came together to discuss forming a new association. In late 1977, AAAL was established, and it held its first annual meeting in 1978 with the LSA. Shifts in emphasis in AAAL annual meeting programs track the evolution of the field, from earlier domination of language teaching topics to more recent coverage of a broader range of issues including second language acquisition, language testing, discourse analysis, and language policy and planning. In the move away from language pedagogy and linguistics toward language and social phenomena more generally, the field was "drawing on anthropology, sociology, and media studies" (Rampton, 1995:234). And in 1992, AILA described applied linguistics "as a means to help solve specific problems in society ... in which language plays a role" (Tucker, 1996).

As the changing context at the end of the 20th century reframes social issues, it recasts the language issues as well. We no longer "apply linguistics" per se to these problems — we build on insights from linguistics in conjunction with insights from other fields in interdisciplinary efforts.

One way of looking at it is that applied linguistics ultimately seeks to answer questions outside of linguistics, to which linguistic data, methods, or theories may be applied. Lise Menn's account of working with speech pathology clients earlier in this symposium is a good example. Language produced by stroke victims provides interesting data for theoretical investigations within linguistics. However, if you look instead from the patient's perspective, you are led to ask different questions. Instead of analyzing speech as data to address questions in linguistics, you might examine communicative structures to find out about approximative strategies that would enhance the patient's ease of communication. In this case, you would use insights and methods from linguistics and other fields to address a problem outside linguistics (though you could well gain important insights into linguistic issues in the process).

Applied Linguistics as an Interdisciplinary Enterprise

Grabe and Kaplan (1992) in their *Introduction to Applied Linguistics* compare applied linguistics to engineering. Engineering draws from a number of disciplines (math, physics, chemistry) and engineers of different types rely on other disciplines to solve specific problems (geology for a civil engineer, etc.). In a similar fashion, we can think of applied linguistics as drawing from all areas of linguistics, and then adding insights from other disciplines for different language-related problems — education, anthropology, psychometrics, sociology, and so on. In other words, applied linguistics is inherently interdisciplinary.

There is considerable recent consensus about applied linguistics as interdisciplinary — Dick Tucker (1996) applauds the field's "rapid growth as an interdisciplinary field" in his entry on "applied linguistics" on the LSA website, *http://www.lsadc.org/web2/fldfr.htm*; TESOL's Applied Linguistics Forum in its newsletter in 1997 comments on its "vitality and growth as an interdisciplinary field (Thomas-Ruzic 1997:15). At CAL, we reflect that interdisciplinary trend — we find we have to in order to address real world problems effectively. In a quick review of degrees held by current staff (which numbers about 55), we have a good number holding graduate degrees in linguistics, a few in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics, but also degrees in specific languages, cognitive and social psychology, educational psychology, ESL/multicultural education/bilingual education, educational measurement, health administration, among others.

Current Issues in Applied Linguistics

Let me move quickly to some major areas of current interest. I will draw here most on work at CAL, describing briefly some areas that will take us into the next millennium.

Innovative Language Education and Assessment

The need for people from different language backgrounds to communicate is becoming even stronger as populations move, meet, and interact with more frequency. This calls for better language education and assessment to help people achieve their linguistic goals and make good use of linguistic resources. A promising trend in language instruction has been the integration of language and content. Content-based language teaching, for example, uses interesting and appropriate subject matter as the vehicle for developing mastery of language forms and functions. It emphasizes meaning and meaningful uses of language that provide a scaffold for the learner to higher levels of language proficiency (differing considerably from earlier methodologies that emphasized drill and practice with rote memorization). For minority learners of the majority language in a society (English language learners in the United States, for example), this approach brings the advantage of incorporating content learning (school subjects or employment skills) into language teaching. Refinements of this approach continue to be investigated, including adjustments for proficiency and cognitive levels, the role of a focus on language forms, and the use of authentic and/or accommodated materials (Christian and Rhodes 1998; Short 1991).

A stronger orientation toward proficiency as a goal of language instruction has brought a parallel emphasis on proficiency in assessment. As a result, measuring language proficiency (both oral and written) continues to be explored. Ways of administering assessments are also evolving. The basic, face-to-face, oral proficiency interview has been augmented by tape-mediated methods (both audio and video) (Stansfield and Kenyon 1996), and now computer-based proficiency testing is being developed. The changing technology context has obvious implications for both language teaching and assessment.

Crafting Sensible Approaches to Linguistic Diversity

Improved understanding of, and sensible approaches to, linguistic and cultural diversity in

society are increasingly critical, particularly in schools and workplaces. Language is at the core, both in the real language differences that come into play and in the symbolic proxy it provides. Headlines in recent years on hot issues such as Ebonics and bilingual education demonstrate the widespread misunderstanding of the underpinnings of those issues and of language in general. As a member of LSA's Committee on Language in the School Curriculum from 1996 to 1998, I noted that most of the committee's discussion focused on language issues stemming from diversity. While we understand many of the linguistic principles underlying variation in language (vernacular and prestige dialects) and multilingualism in society, addressing the many educational and social issues that arise in connection with diversity remains a complex undertaking.

Policy and Planning in Language-Related Contexts

Increases in diversity related to political developments call for policies to promote the welfare of individuals, groups, and societies. The movement of populations around the world (the 20th Century has been called "The Century of the Refugee") and the realignment of national boundaries create a need for policies to address educational, social, and political matters. There are obvious language policy decisions, such as the designation of an official language, as well as choices where the role of language is less obvious, such as financial decisions about providing interpreters in court proceedings. The United States, although it does not have an explicit formally stated language policy, nonetheless has implicit language policies embodied in diverse federal, state, and local laws and regulations. Policy formulation and analysis that is informed by linguistic expertise is increasingly needed.

Better information and understanding of how language works and how people learn languages is sorely needed. Myths and misconceptions about language pervade public discourse and underlie policy decisions at all levels. Many arguments against bilingual education, for example, can be traced to a belief that maintaining a native language lessens the "space available" for mastering the majority language. There is also a popular conception that standard varieties of a language are somehow inherently better than vernacular varieties ("good" and "bad" English). The link needs to be made between social/political issues and accurate linguistic

information, a connection found in the scope of applied linguistics.

Issues in Business and the Workplace

It has become almost a cliche to talk about the "global" economy and globalization of business. As corporations and governments work multinationally, understanding how to accomplish communication across languages and cultures becomes increasingly important. Translation, interpretation, and language learning for specific purposes are skills that more and more businesses value. Many companies are themselves multinational and face situations not unlike multilingual societies. Corporate language policies may be called for, to choose a language for use across offices around the world and to set the levels of language skills needed by staff in different positions in the various offices.

Language issues in the workplace have also grown in salience recently. In the mid-1980s, Shirley Brice Heath and Charles Ferguson organized and taught a course on "Language in Professional Contexts" at the LSA Institute at the University of Illinois—Urbana/Champaign, one of the first attempts to bring together developing knowledge about professional varieties (primarily of English), including those in law, insurance, medicine, and so on, with a particular view toward what linguistics could contribute. Interest in discourse in professional settings is growing, and technology contexts (and applications) are of great concern now. As linguistic diversity in the workplace has gotten more attention, cross-cultural communication, vocational language learning, and language assessment are emerging as bigger issues in need of input from applied linguists.

Future Directions in Applied Linguistics

Working on issues like those in the last section is clearly going to take us well into the next millennium. For future directions in applied linguistics, we should also consider features of the changing context that will have implications for our work, as we think about problems outside linguistics that would benefit from linguistic tools and information.

A recent study of trends for non-profit organizations illuminates some of these changes. KPMG Peat Marwick (1997) consider several themes that relate clearly to language issues

(demographic, economic, and technological), although they do not specifically draw those connections.

Demographic: The population will continue to grow more diverse, but the notion of a "melting pot" is transforming into an expectation of multiculturalism, where cultural diversity is appreciated and individuals take pride in their heritage. We may look forward to increasing interest in language revitalization and better cross-cultural communication. Also, the population will be significantly older: "While one in every 25 people was over age 65 in 1900, by 2040, one in every four or five Americans will be over 65" (KPMG Peat Marwick 1997:2). Language issues related to aging will not only be medical in origin (language pathologies) but also social (cross-group communication patterns) and cognitive (language learning and development).

Economic: A "growing demand for knowledge workers" and an "increase in international competition" are highlighted. "Knowledge" industries call for different types of skills than workers have needed in the past, many of which depend on language-related competencies, including new communication processes, literacy skills, and technical language skills, that need to be understood so they may be developed and assessed.

Technological: Technology is "changing the way we learn, work, and govern" (KPMG Peat Marwick 1997:7). With people and institutions linked through technology, communication and education become independent of time and location, causing a transformation in our habits and expectations. This trend affects both the demands on language, as the medium of communication, and the ways in which we learn and assess language. For example, conceptions of what constitute "literacy" are changing, as it expands to include visual, non-print, as well as print domains (consider the use of icons on computers, fast-food restaurant cash registers, and elsewhere).

Within linguistics, a panel convened by the National Science Foundation looked at the field from the perspective of developing human capital, identifying research questions for the future and potential areas for contributions from linguistics (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1996). The panel set its premise as follows:

> Given the cognitive basis of the human language faculty and the sociocultural context in which language use is embedded, linguistic investigation has played

> and should continue to play a central role in advancing our basic understanding of the effective utilization of human capital. (p.1)

The group found strong links between linguistic research and potential contributions to issues that are basic to building human capital, on themes of:

> "fostering successful families" (p. 4)
>
> "building strong neighborhoods" (p. 5)
>
> "educating for the future" (p. 6)
>
> "employing a productive workforce" (p. 8)
>
> "reducing disadvantage in a diverse society" (p. 9)
>
> "overcoming poverty and deprivation" (p. 10)

Linguists working in applied linguistics will need to extract and respond to the language-related issues embedded in these social concerns and work with specialists in other fields in order to fill the role envisioned in that report.

Conclusion

What is needed to meet these challenges in applied linguistics? Linguists need to play a role—if they don't, others will deal with language issues and not nearly as well. But they must be prepared to work with specialists from other disciplines, and to draw on other knowledge bases in addition to linguistics. We need to make excellent courses available to students in other specialties, to inspire knowledgeable and interested collaborators in our future interdisciplinary efforts (as well as to help develop a better informed citizenry).

Students of linguistics should be allowed and encouraged to explore both applied and theoretical issues as they make their ways to their degrees and decide where to specialize. They need to get into the field as well as work on theoretical issues to appreciate the value of both. If they head toward applied linguistics areas, in particular, they must be prepared to identify and address language problems as members of interdisciplinary teams. They also must understand the need to monitor the changing context to look for signs that will tell us where the practical language problems of the future lie. Part of the changing context is, of course, the changing student population. The typical graduate or even undergraduate student has significantly more work experience than in the past, and many are working professionally while they pursue their

studies. This provides a natural venue for taking a problem-solving approach to linguistics learning.

In applied linguistics, we must look ahead and remain attuned to the changes in our world that have linguistic dimensions. As we move into the next millennium, we must ensure that the accumulated knowledge and tools of linguistics remain at the table when language-related problems are taken up.

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